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V CORPS ENGINEERS CONDUCT LIVE-FIRE TRAINING IN PREPARATION FOR RETURN TO IRAQ

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565th Engineer Battalion, 130th Engineer Brigade

HANAU, Germany — “Put down the fruit! Drop it, back up and turn around!” barked 2nd Lt. Andrew Sawyer.

Sawyer, a maintenance platoon leader with the 502nd Engineer Company (Multi-role Bridge) of V Corps’ 130th Engineer Brigade, was shouting at a fellow Soldier who was playing the role of an Iraqi vendor during a recent training exercise the unit conducted in preparation for deployment to Operation Iraqi Freedom.



CAPT ERICA IVERSON

Soldier from the 502nd Engineer Company of V Corps’ 565th Engineer Battalion, 130th Engineer Brigade train on conducting a reconnaissance mission with the threat of chemical attack during the unit’s recent exercise at the Aschaffenburg (Germany) Training Area

The two-and-a-half-week exercise for the 565th Engineer Battalion, the 502nd’s parent battalion, was dubbed Renegade Warrior. Its purpose was to ready the unit for a return to Iraq. The 502nd supported Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom from March to October 2003.

The 565th planned and executed the external evaluation exercise to train the company on counter-insurgency tasks. The first phase of the training focused on "Situational Training Exercise" lanes at the Aschaffenburg (Germany) Training Area. That training incorporated scenarios common to Iraqi Freedom, and had a platoon conduct base camp security and guard a traffic control point while encountering mock situations designed to distract them from their mission. Rioting demonstrators, meddling reporters, peddlers selling hot sodas and rotten fruit, a pregnant suicide bomber and angry anti-coalition forces attempting to infiltrate the wire barrier were a few of the scenarios the Soldiers of the 502nd had to control.

The unit trained on several other types of missions as well, handling including roadside attacks with explosive devices, performing first aid and dealing with chemical attacks.

"We went out to focus on specific tasks, and after the 'crawl phase' on the first day, the teams and unit cohesion were more solid. Confidence was more prevalent in the Soldiers and a greater respect for the junior and company leadership grew with each mission," said Maj. Wendell Stevens, the 565th's executive officer. "Through this realistic training, we emphasized the basics, and everyone was able to see the individual and company progress in making the company battle-ready."

Phase two of the mission-readiness exercise was conducted at the Grafenwoehr (Germany) Training Area -- a lengthy convoy from Aschaffenburg.

In Grafenwoehr, Soldiers of the 502nd qualified on a variety of assigned weapons.

The final phase of training was a convoy live-fire exercise, now mandatory for any unit returning to Iraq.

The first day of the live-fire included safety briefings, mission briefings to the unit's platoon leadership and practice battle drills.

On the day of execution, the unit had dry rehearsals for day and night missions so the Soldiers could get a feel for the convoy live-fire lanes. Each convoy consisted of six vehicles and a command and control element.

Staff Sgt. Daniel Deboer was the section sergeant for his section of 18 Soldiers. Using radios, hand and arm signals, and vehicle lights, Deboer signaled each vehicle in his convoy.

"Enemy on the left! Initiate fire!" he yelled over the sound of bullets spraying six black-and-white-striped targets identified as anti-coalition forces. As the vehicles negotiated the 6-mile-long path, they encountered simulated attacks by rocket-propelled grenades, roadside explosives, sniper fire and an attack while the vehicles were stopped during a maintenance halt. The final challenge was a scenario that involved a vehicle ambush in which emergency first aid and a medical evacuation by helicopter needed to be performed.

"Overall, we executed all training to a new standard. Soldiers have been complacent, but in the training from the last two weeks, new Soldiers were exposed to the real-world scenarios, and it hit home," Deboer commented after the training. Five of the 20 Soldiers in Deboer's section were not with the unit during its first deployment to Iraq.

Spc. Jack Longmire is a wheeled vehicle mechanic for the 502nd.

"It's been a long time since our company has done good training like that," Longmire said. "As a mechanic, we're usually left out of the hands-on training, but we all learned a lot through this."

"I'm a lot more comfortable going into Iraq this second round. We at least know what to expect this time."

During the 502nd's first tour in Iraq, the unit made news for constructing the "Birthday Bridge," said to be the longest assault float bridge built under combat conditions. Spanning the Tigris River in Tikrit, Iraq, the bridge was built in former Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein's hometown, on his birthday -- April 28, 2003.

Upon redeployment to Germany in October, the 502nd Engineer Company (Assault Float Bridge) merged with the 38th Engineer Company (Medium Girder Bridge) to form a new multi-role bridge company.

The 502nd is slated to return to Iraq this fall under the command of Capt. Joshua Stringer, to provide bridging support to coalition forces.

